

Magazine Feature Section

The "GRAND OLD BUNK" IN SPORT

Boxing and Football to Retain Virility of the Race, Breeding Thoroughbred Race Horses to Supply Remounts for the Army and Other Claims of "Get-the-Money" Adherents of Athletics Are Exploded Theories.

BY J. B. SHERIDAN.

THE OST of us, like Romain Rolland's hero, Jean Christophe, have been hurled against sham morality, compromise and untruth. Americans know these things under the generic slang term of the "grand old bunk." The great war has been useful in showing us the utter rottenness and insincerity of many shams which we have been accustomed to regard as gospel truths in athletics and in sport. For nowhere has the "grand old bunk" been in general use as in the realm of professional sport.

I have no doubt that the "grand old bunk" prevails in business to a greater extent than it does in sport. Maybe the "grand old bunk" is part of business. It is not proper part of sport. Therefore, many sportsmen have revolted against the "grand old bunk" being fetched into sport. They are glad to see the great war come along, and for the time being at least, toss the "grand old bunk" into the discard.

The three leading articles in the decalogue of the "grand old bunk" have been especially hateful. They are:

1. That professional boxing, with gloves, for an admission fee, with moving pictures taken, is essential to the preservation of the virility of the Anglo-Saxon race.
2. The "stall" of the promoters of Rugby football that playing Rugby is essential to winning battles, the alleged dictum of the duke of Wellington that Waterloo was won on the football fields of Eton being always quoted.
3. The "stall" of the men promoting horse-racing for the money that was in it, said "stall" being that horse-racing, with gambling attachments, was essential to the safety of the nation because it enabled men to breed thoroughbreds to serve as cavalry horses in war time.

Just why money-hungry promoters of boxing matches could not say "We are after a piece of change" instead of "stalling" about the manliness of boxing with an admission fee attached and its essentiality to the maintenance of the virility of the Anglo-Saxon race (most great boxers have been Celtic, Semitic or Hamitic) was more than I could understand. You let them fight all week without charging any admission fee, and you would see how many of them would care for the virility of the race.

As far as the promoters of horse-racing for the sake of the jobs and money that was in it for them are concerned, I never could see why they were around talking of the benefits the breeding of the thoroughbred horse conferred on the farmer or on the cavalry. If there were benefits they were so remote as to be indiscernible.

So, instead of "stalling" about the benefit the thoroughbred did the country's cavalry, etc., why not step up and say, "We are in this horse-racing game, as good Americans, for the 'dough' there may be in it for us. I want to be a judge, Jim wants to be a starter, Joe wants to run the betting ring. We'll all see some sport, have a good time and maybe make a little money. Are you with us?"

Sure, we'd be with them. Why "stall" about the cavalry and the farmer?

Worrying About Jobs.

So, too, about the football "bunk." Football is a grand, good game for those who like to play it. It's fun. But, when it was under censure, a lot of professional coaches, who were worrying about their jobs, went about crying that the virility of the country was endangered when football was threatened with destruction.

I dare say it is natural with a man to feel that the end of the world or chaos has come when he loses his good, soft job. Maybe the football coaches were sincere when they fancied that the discontinuance of rugby, and of their jobs, would ruin the nation.

Yet, instead of bellowing about the value of football to national virility, why did not these fellows come out and say:

"We are strong for Rugby football. Some guys like to play it. We like to coach them because there is money in it for us. Are you with us?"

Of course, we'd have been with them. Why not? Football, like racing and like boxing, is fun. It appeals to a lot of people. Why not go to it, direct, on its merits as a sport and a means of making money, and not "stall" about moral and physical grounds which do not exist?

The grandest and oldest of all the "grand old bunk" has been the "stall" about the value of professional boxing, with admission fees chargeable at the door, and moving-picture rights on the side, in upbuilding and maintaining the virile virtues of the nation.

A lot of good, clear-seeing men, George Borrow included, have been caught by this grandest of all the "grand old bunks." Borrow once wrote a fine appreciation of the manliness of the bruisers of Britain. Borrow believed what he wrote. He lived before the days of Jack Curley, "Tex" Rickard and Tom Jones. There were no great "gates" to boxing matches in Borrow's day, no motion pictures. Were Borrow alive today he might think differently. He might see that as soldiers or as assistants to military ardor, or efficiency, the boxers were of no value whatever.

The pugilist seems to be the chief "slacker"

of the times. They are straining the pugilist as a backslider. Gov. Whitman of New York set the fashion when he refused to let Les Darcy, the Australian, box in New York, because, Whitman alleged, Darcy should be fighting for Australia and the British Empire. Gov. Whitman's decision is open to at least a legal argument. Darcy is of Norman-Irish descent. Many men of Irish blood object to fighting for England. Yet the general feeling is that a man should fight for the country wherein he makes his living.

Australia has been good to Darcy. It gave him birth, great strength, good education, fame and some money. Americans have little patience with the man who takes all a country has to give, then refuses to give anything in return. One can be a parasite, especially in war time. So, in the main, morally, Gov. Whitman is right. So long as a man lives under a flag, derives his livelihood from the nation, he owes it service. Whatever flag may float over Australia, it is a free country. Darcy did not need to live there if he did not wish to. Free or not free though the country be, the human feeling is that so long as one accepts life from it he owes it the last full measure of devotion.

There is little sympathy and no respect for the man who lives in the United States yet refuses to fight for the country. So it is with the man who lives in England, Germany, Australia, France, Turkey or any other country under the sun. If you choose to reside in a country you owe it service.

It must be admitted that the so-called fighting men, the pugilists, the bruisers of the world have not acted well by their countries. Darcy acted badly by Australia, a free country, flying the British flag. When he found that he could not be allowed to box in the United States, he let himself be persuaded into more shameful action than he had been guilty of in Australia. He let it be known that he would enlist in the United States forces, provided he was given a furlough to take part in five boxing matches.

The answer the United States would give to that may be imagined. Who is Darcy? A boxer, an alien, a man who left his own country in time of stress to make conditions with the United States. The United States makes no treaties, no conditions with any man. Admiral Dewey could not have made conditions with the United States. Of course, Darcy did not make the conditions on his own hook. Pugilistic promoters did that. The pugilistic promoters are treading on dangerous ground. It seems that some of them would drag the Goddess of Liberty into the ring and bill her as the champion muscle dancer of the world if they could thereby draw a good gate. They'd make her do a hoola-hoola dance, too, if they thought it would attract money. There is little sense of decency among the pugilistic promoters of the United States. They are sadly in need of a lesson. They'll get it, too, if they do not watch their step.

Gov. Whitman is "sore" at the prize ring. Those who are familiar with the practices of promoters and managers to get money, will sympathize with the executive. We all start out by liking the prize ring. We all wind up by wanting to destroy it. There are qualities about it which one likes—and yet and yet—

Pierce Mathews, a remote fighter of St. Louis, cannot say anything too bad about the sport which gave him bread and butter for many years. We can scarcely blame Mathews, yet we hate to see a man abuse the source of his bread and butter. Withal, there are few former boxers who like the ring. Rarely, indeed, do you see the son of a boxer in the squared circle. I have known but few boxers who wished their sons to adopt the vocation of their fathers. In cases where former pugilists induct their sons into the ring, the boys themselves detest it. Old Tom Kelly of St. Louis, a middleweight champion, about 1860 wanted his son, Eddie, to become a prizefighter. Eddie Kelly was game. He took a terrific beating from Dan Daly in the hardest sort of fashion. But Eddie Kelly always despised and detested the ring. He would not speak of it to a son of his.

Bob Fitzsimmons entertained some pugilistic ambitions for his son, Robert, Jr. The youth never displayed any aptitude for the squared circle. His father tried hard to imbue him with the fighting spirit, in vain. Old Fitzsimmons taught the young one everything he could teach him. The boy refused to be taught. Probably Fitz only wanted to make a piece of money with his son. In any event, the boy never did really enter the arena.

They call professional boxers "fighting men."

Darcy Made Aviator.

Of course, the United States would not notice such an impudent offer. But in a moment of mental aberration the military authorities of the State of Tennessee did enlist Darcy in the aero service, agreeing to the proviso that he should be given a furlough to take part in boxing contests.

What would be done to Gen. Wood, former President Roosevelt, Mr. Bryan or any other distinguished man who offered to enlist in the United States service provided he was given a furlough to deliver five lectures or five speeches to run for office or to make money?

It seems that the best thing the United States could do with James Leslie Darcy would be to turn him over to the Australian authorities. Would the Dingoes have him? I doubt it. All of which shows that a man must stick with his gang in time of trouble. Poor Darcy is probably not to blame. Pin-headed promoters, who would cheerfully have Darcy shot in their arenas could they draw a gate, with impunity persuaded the poor boy—he is but 29 years old—to take the course of action which has brought him into disrepute the world over.

It is the old story. The promoter is to blame, nine times out of ten, for the sins that are committed in pugilism.



LES DARCY

That was the old English term for the fraternity. Yet, outside of the ring, the "fighting men" did little fighting. The annals of war bear few of the names of pugilists. We have been told of the virile valor that is bred by permitting boxing with an admission fee attached. Prunes! Boxing for prizes, with a nice admission fee charged may breed valor. We have no evidences that it does. Let them box all they want to. Deny them the privileges of charging admission fees and see how many of them care about promoting boxing for virile valor's sake.

I become weary when men who wish to bet on racehorses seek publicity for the scheme of breeding thoroughbred horses for the use of the cavalry in war. Let them breed cavalry horses all they want to. It is not necessary to race horses to breed them. Or let them race them and breed them all they want to, but deny them the privilege of betting on them. Then see how far their interest in horse breeding for cavalry

purposes will go. Now the United States are at war. Where is Jess Willard, champion boxer of the world? Showing with a circus. True, his manager wired in his name to the president, offering Willard's services. Who is Willard to wire an offer of his services to the president of the United States? If Willard wants to serve the United States, let him step into the nearest recruiting office and "take on." Will Willard do that?

As for the thoroughbred horse, will you find him carrying men or hauling guns in this war? You will not. The gasoline tractor and the good, old Missouri mule, direct descendant of

a long-eared Malaga jackass, are so much better war horses than the thoroughbred that you will find the gasoline tractor and the mule where you won't see a hair of a horse in a week's marching. Therefore, we find the "grand old bunk" pretty well shot out of sport. If we were a pugilist or a promoter of pugilism, we'd quit talking about the virility of the race, take up a rifle and go to it. If the pugilist sticks to the circus and the stage in this war, the people will not have much use for him now, then or hereafter. We hope we have heard the last of the value of the gambling tout, the thoroughbred horse, as a cavalry remount.